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Approved For Release 2002/08/20 : CIA-RDP78S02149R000100130003-3

Comments on The Case for Bombing

In the attached article which appeared in the New York Times of 12 October, Hanson Baldwin writes that, according to Pentagon appraisals, the bombing campaign in North Vietnam and Laos has led to a definite reduction in the supply tonnages moved into South Vietnam from the North. The infrequency of major Communist military operations earlier this year, in turn, was related to supply inadequacies. Without attempting to comment on Communist military tactics, we estimate that any inadequacies of supplies in the South -- no general shortage of supplies has been apparent -- are primarily a result of Allied air and ground operations in the South as opposed to air operations over North Vietnam or Laos. The traffic through the Laotian corridor in the dry season, supplemented by supplies infiltrated through the DMZ, by sea, and from Cambodia, has been more than adequate to meet the estimated overall Communist requirements in South Vietnam from external sources under current combat conditions. The lack of any Communist attempt to move trucks through the southern part of the Laotian corridor during at least half of the rainy season supports this estimate. Moreover, the build-up in the DMZ continues apace although concentrated air strikes against the North Vietnamese Panhandle apparently have inflicted heavy damage to stocks, vehicles, watercraft, and roads.

Baldwin quotes US intelligence experts as estimating that the enemy main force in the South requires about 150 tons of supplies a day -- chiefly ammunition and weapons -- but that various sources believe supply tonnages, presumably arriving in the South, have been reduced to 75-90 tons a day, with indications that as little as 57 tons a day were received in August. The article implies that these requirements must all be met from external sources. The current daily external supply requirement of Communist forces in South Vietnam cannot be estimated with confidence at this time. Exclusive of food, however, the external requirement probably is only on the order of 20 to 30 tons, most of which has moved from North Vietnam through the Laotian corridor. The external food requirement of the Communist forces in the rice-deficit Central Highland provinces of South Vietnam probably is met for the most part by deliveries from Cambodia which would seldom transit Laos and would, therefore, be subject to attack only within South Vietnam. Cambodia apparently is making available to Communist forces in South Vietnam during calendar year 1966 some 10,000-20,000 tons of rice (roughly 25-50 tons per day).

The 150 ton daily requirement quoted above is the same as our estimate of the total resupply requirement of the main and local Communist forces

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in South Vietnam as of mid-1966. This requirement, however, consisted predominantly of food supplied primarily for internal sources. The daily supply tonnages of 75-90 tons are fairly consistent with our estimates of supplies moved from North Vietnam into Southern Laos in the past dry season for Communist troops in both Southern Laos and South Vietnam. However, we estimate that only 10 tons moved into Laos daily in the rainy season, compared with the 57 tons for August quoted by Baldwin.

Baldwin's statement that all but 20 percent of North Vietnam's petroleum storage facilities have been destroyed is in error. All but 20 percent of the JCS targeted POL storage capacity has been destroyed. In addition, North Vietnam has an unknown but significant POL storage capacity in dispersed tank sites.

Prepared by

13 October 1966

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Attachment:

Article from the New York Times of
12 October 1966

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